

INTRODUCTION TO HERALDRY

by

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HERALDRY IS INDEED one of the oldest of human arts and is as alive today as it was in the time of its greatest extension. It is a pre-historical art that extends far back to the earliest primitive ages of man. Long before man had learned to clothe himself with the hides of animals and the barks of trees, man had learned to place tribal and group markings on and in his skin in order to tell to the world the tribe or family group of which he was a member and the place that he called "home". Modern primitive tribes still mark themselves with heraldic designs on their bodies or on their clothing, just as their ancient forebears in pre-historic times adorned theirs. One who makes frequent trips to the mountain regions soon learn to distinguish one tribe from another not by their physical characteristics but by the tattooing on the body or the tribal colors and designs that obtain on the clothing that they wear. The red loin cloths of the Bontoc Igorot proclaim provenance just as effectively as the gray and blue weaves of the Benguet group. Take away the clothing and hide the markings on their body and it is impossible to distinguish a Bontoc from an Ifugao but meet them on the market place with their clothing and other external distinguishing features and one can easily discover who they are and from whence they have come.

The science of Heraldry has a language of its own and in most complex forms it requires considerable study and research. The language of modern heraldry, mainly derived from the French, is such, that from the blazoning or description of a coat of arms in heraldic terms it is possible for a heraldic student who is in a foreign country to easily reproduce a coat of arms without the need of a sketch accom-

panying the blazoning. As an example, there was in the archives no pictures of the coat of arms of Lipa — granted by the King of Spain to that Batangas town in 1895 — however, a description or blazoning of the coat of arms written in heraldic language was found in the Royal Decree and from this it was very easy for the Heraldry Committee to reproduce the seal of Lipa.

The seal of a province or chartered city would mean nothing if it did not originate in the city or province or if it did not contain something that was especially related to them. It was for that reason that the Heraldry Committee would not work on a coat of arms unless the officials of the city or province submitted to the Committee a sketch or a list of the features which they wished to have incorporated in the coat of arms. Every coat of arms submitted to the President for approval contained some features submitted by the governors or mayors of the government entity concerned. Some submitted too many items that could not for heraldic and artistic reasons be included but the Committee saw to it that the principal or most characteristic elements were included in the final designs. Special effort was made to eliminate small details which would disappear when the seal would be reduced to small dimensions. Details which could be recognized on a seal with a diameter of four inches would not appear on a seal that was reduced to one inch or half an inch in diameter. Some provinces submitted a seal superimposed on the national coat of arms. These could not be approved as no provincial or chartered city should utilize the national coat of arms on its seal.

It is believed that the more simple the design, the easier it is to adapt it to heraldic and artistic standards.

One province submitted in its list:

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rice, corn, coconut, abaca, birds, fishes, cattle, lumber, an ancient tower, the national arms — an eagle and a few other details. It is obvious that the coat of arms committee could not use all of them but there were always three or four items which could and were selected to make a very distinctive and characteristic seal and it could not be denied that although it was arranged by the Committee, the main features originated in that particular city or province. Some provinces submitted designs which were so excellent from the point of view of art that they only required slight changes to conform with the canons of heraldry. There were only a few provinces which have not submitted sketches or lists of what they would like to incorporate in their seals. In fact, only about twelve provinces and four chartered cities do not now have an approved coat of arms. It is expected that all will soon be submitted.

Probably the first coats of arms that specifically refer to the Philippines are the coats of arms of Magellan and El Cano which were awarded to them by the King of Spain. The earliest granting of a coat of arms to a Philippine city was that granted to the Ever Loyal City of Manila in 1596 by King Philip of Spain.

Many of the old Spanish settlers brought with them their family coat of arms and there were few of the governors of the Philippines and archbishops of Manila who did not have their family or ecclesiastic coat of arms. A study of the coats of arms of Philippine officials and dignitaries from Legaspi to the present day would be a fruitful field for research.

The first coat of arms committee in the Philippines was appointed by President Quezon with Mr. Teodoro Kalaw as chairman and the author as technical adviser. On the death of Mr. Kalaw, a second committee was appointed with the author as chairman. On his resignation on July 4, 1946, Dr. Jose

Bantug was appointed chairman with the writer as technical consultant. The committee greatly regretted the loss, during the war, of Major Baja, a committee member who was one of the very few Filipino students of heraldry who had spent many years of research in that very difficult field. The Secretary of the Committee, Lt. Galo Ocampo is at present abroad and has taken a special course in heraldry at the Heraldry Section of the U. S. War Department.

With the return of the Chairman, Dr. Bantug and the secretary and the appointment of new members to take the place of those who have passed away, the Heraldry Committee will be able to make a valuable contribution to the history of the Republic and to its prestige abroad. The completion of the seals of the provinces and chartered cities is only the beginning of a very complicated and important task.

There is a great need for a Handbook of Philippines Heraldry for the use of Philippine Government offices and especially for members of the foreign service. This shall contain both the elements of foreign heraldry and heraldry as related to the Philippines. The international protocols on flags, coats of arms, decorations and distinctions are such that they are of greater and increasing importance now that the country is an independent Republic.

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